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**Many changes have been enacted by DMF affecting commercial and recreational fishing for 2001. Most of these changes bring the Commonwealth into compliance with species-specific interstate management plans.** Contact DMF for details about any of these rule changes. (Gloucester 978.282.0308/ Boston 617.626.1520/ Pocasset 508.563.1779/ Martha's Vineyard 508.693.4372)

❖ **Summer Flounder (Fluke)**

**Commercial** quota is 645,663 pounds, a reduction of about 100,000 lbs. compared to last year. Approximately 80% is likely to remain for the summer fishery. As of April 23<sup>rd</sup> the trip limit will be 100 pounds per day (netters and longliners only) until the end of the squid season (May 31 or June 15, based on DMF monitoring.) **DMF will publicize the end of the squid season.**

The directed fishery for summer flounder (fluke) will open on Sunday, July 8, 2001 for all gear types, and will remain open until the quota is reached. There will be no commercial fishing for on Fridays and Saturdays after July 8 and fluke may not be landed between the hours of 8 PM and 6 AM. To improve landings data, DMF will be requiring all fishermen who hold a fluke license to submit an annual catch report to DMF, similar to that required for striped bass. These data will allow us to produce a more complete picture of landings by gear, time, and permit holder.

*There will not be separate quotas and/or seasons for draggers and hook-fishermen as was proposed at public hearing. Possession limits for the two user groups, like last year, will be 300 lbs. for netters and 200 pounds for fishermen using hook gear until the quota has been taken.*

All fluke must be separated from other species for easy inspection by Environmental Police. Fluke possession limits apply to each vessel regardless of the number of permitted fishermen aboard. Commercial minimum size for fluke is 14 inches. Fluke quotas can be monitored weekly through the NMFS web-site at <http://www.nero.nmfs.gov/ro/fso/rpts.htm>.

**Recreational** changes were enacted as a result of a recent federal court decision and all states must comply with a mandate to reduce catches. For the Massachusetts recreational fishing sector, a reduction in harvest of 29% is required. To accomplish this, DMF has enacted the following: minimum size limit of 16 1/2", bag limit of 7 fish and open season of May 25-September 5. These changes increase the size limit by one inch, decrease the bag limit by one fish and shorten the season by 40 days.

❖ **Striped Bass**

**Commercial fishery** will open on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Regulations and quotas are unchanged from last year. Commercial landings will only be allowed on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday until the quota is harvested. Trip limit is 40 fish per vessel per day. Commercial minimum size for striped bass is 34 inches.

**Recreational fishery:** Minimum size lowered from 30 inches to 28 inches and "high grading" prohibited. The size limit was dropped to 28" and this is expected to remain in place through 2002. An updated stock assessment suggested fishery performance is within management plan guidelines.

"High-grading" striped bass has been prohibited.

"High grading" is a practice where anglers continue fishing after retaining a smaller fish and then "swap" the smaller fish for a larger fish. This problem is especially acute during fishing tournaments. Officers have reported that some anglers place fish back in the water after a line or chain has been tied through its' gill cover and secured to

the shoreline. Once placed on a "stringer" the fish is kept alive, but we know from past hook-release studies that chances for survival and healthy recovery decrease considerably for these fish.

This problem is exacerbated by the Commonwealth's one-fish limit. All jurisdictions south of Massachusetts allow 2 fish per angler, with the exception of New York where only charter/party boats customers are allowed the second fish. Rules in some of the other states require the second fish in possession to be quite large (over 34" in Virginia and over 40" in Connecticut). Until there is more support in the Commonwealth to increase the bag limit up to two fish, the high-grade problem needed to be addressed.

#### ❖ Scup

**Commercial** quota for the May-October period is similar to last year's quota at 362,849 pounds. Weir landings capped at 75,000 among all operators. Dragners are allowed 100 lbs. per day during the inshore squid season (April 23 through – May 31 or later if extended). On July 17, all gear types may land 200 pounds per day with no commercial landings on weekends (Saturday or Sunday) until the quota is filled. Commercial minimum size is 9 inches.

**Recreational** regulations regarding bag limits and seasons have changed: for *anglers fishing from shore or on private vessels*, the daily possession limit will be **50 fish per angler** and **100 per vessel**. For anglers fishing aboard *party or charter* vessels the daily possession limit will be **100 per angler during May and June, and reduced to 50 per angler beginning in July** through the season end. For all anglers, the recreational fishing season **will be closed after October 6 through the end of the year**.

#### ❖ Black Sea Bass

**Commercial** quotas and trip limits have changed. The second quarter is open from April 01 – June 30 and the initial trip limit is 1,500 pounds per day. The third quarter is open July 01 – September 30, and the initial trip limit is 1,000 pounds/day. The fourth quarter is open October 01– December 31, and the initial trip limit is 2,000 pounds/day. For each of the quarters, when 40% of the quarterly quota is taken the trip limit will drop.

Before mid-May commercial fishermen should expect the trip limit to drop substantially. The ASMFC voted to drop the trip limit to just 150 lbs./day or 1,000 lbs./week once 40% of the quota was reached. DMF will publicize details to licensed fishermen and dealers when this change is made.

**Recreational** The interstate management plan requires states to constrain recreational harvest to reduce fishing mortality on black sea bass. To address past year's increases in recreational harvest along the coast, all states must enact new restrictions to constrain harvest in 2001. For Massachusetts anglers this will mean shortened season with an opening date of May 10, but size limit (12") will remain the same.

#### ❖ Weakfish

A daily recreational possession limit of 12 fish per angler has been enacted. Prior to this year, there was no daily limit. While it's unlikely that many anglers would have opportunity to exceed a 12-fish daily bag while fishing Massachusetts waters, enactment of such a limit is consistent with the spirit and intent of weakfish recovery efforts. The 16" minimum size is unchanged.

#### ❖ White Perch

A 25-fish recreational bag limit and an 8" recreational minimum size were enacted for the first time. White perch are found in salt ponds and estuaries, grow up to 15" and are a popular recreational species. These rules will be similar to those in other states where the harvest of white perch is regulated. These white perch limits apply only to coastal waters defined as waters within the rise and fall of the tide but not above any fishway, dam, or tidal bound established by the Department of Environmental Protection. Taking white perch in fresh water is not affected by this change.

#### ❖ Cod

The commercial trip limits in the Gulf of Maine (north of Cape Cod to NH) remain unchanged but fishermen are reminded of the **May closure** in state waters to **east and south of Cape Cod** (south of 42 degrees latitude). This closure complements the federal Georges' Bank closure that extends to the Mass. coastline south of North Truro.

DMF has enacted complementary closures for nearly all the federal groundfish seasonal/area closures and these can be viewed at the NMFS web-site at: <http://www.nero.nmfs.gov/ro/doc/info4.pdf>

## ❖ Horseshoe crabs

### **Commercial permitting changes**

To comply with the interstate Horseshoe Crab Management Plan, DMF established separate permits for the bait fishery and for biomedical collection. Fishermen are now eligible to purchase only one permit (bait harvester vs. biomedical), and all crabs taken by fishermen with the bait permit are counted against the commercial quota regardless of where they sold them.

Fishermen with bait permit can (a) use crabs for their own bait use; (b) sell crabs to a bait dealer for eventual use as bait; or (c) sell crabs to biomedical companies.

Fishermen with biomedical permit: (a) required to sell only to biomedical companies; and (b) can continue to harvest crabs after the state's quota is reached, provided all crabs are returned alive to the water after bleeding.

By allowing crabs already counted against the quota to be bled before being used for bait, DMF accommodated the need for more crabs in the biomedical industry without compromising our quota management and statistics. By allowing some fishermen to become exclusive biomedical collectors DMF is in compliance with the plan and a supply of crabs for bleeding is maintained even after the quota is reached. In summary, this action: (a) addresses concerns about reduced crab survival rates after bleeding and handling by the biomedical industry; (b) reduces annual total numbers of crabs killed; and (c) creates a better system to track crab landings. Finally, the state's Marine Fisheries Commission voted to deny a public petition that sought to enact a night closure to harvesting; enact 96-hour closures around new and full moons; require conch fishermen to use bait bags; and enact a cap on new permits.

## ❖ Trap tags

### **Commercial trap tags deadline amended.**

The 2001 deadline for placing trap tags on traps has been amended from March 1st to May 1st. This change was warranted to bring state regulation into conformity with those in federal waters and with some of the other states. Trap tags that display the fishermen's permit number and fishery are required on lobster pots, fish pots, and conch pots.

**Non-commercial lobster permit holders are required to tag their traps for the first time and each permit holder who uses pots will** be issued tags in the weeks ahead. Each non-commercial lobster permit holder who checked-off traps on their application will be mailed ten unique tags. Fishermen must attach one tag to each of their traps. These are uniquely numbered single-use tags and fishermen are not allowed to give them away or transfer them to another fisherman.